A STUDIO GHIBLI FILM

SPIRITED AWAY

SEN AND CHIHIRO'S TWOFOLD PAYBACK

I will write about the fearful danger of words. One phrase can change one's fate. It was fall of 2000, if I recall. I bumped into my friend Naoya Fujimaki while I was walking in Akasaka. He would later sing "Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea," and while he was an employee of Hakuhodo DY Media Partners, he even performed on the New Year's Eve Red and White singing program. It was that Fujimaki.

Both of us must have had some time. We went for a cup of tea. The topic of our conversation drifted toward *Spirited Away*, to be released the following summer. For Fujimaki, it wasn't his problem, so he commented irresponsibly on how he expected the box office to do.

"Even if you left it alone, it'll be a big hit. Everyone is saying so. That it will take in at least half of what *Princess Mononoke* did."

This one comment of his lit a fire under me. It made me furious. So that's how everyone thinks of us. When those of us involved in a film project meet, we are totally serious. We never talk about being "optimistic." But according to Fujimaki, even those involved in the film whom I knew well were telling him that it will be an easy winner. This was just after Hayao Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* had set a new box office record for Japanese films.

That day was the start of a major shift in my stance as to how to approach this film. I turned into a furious demon. If they were saying we could make half the amount, I would show them by aiming to double it. In the popular vernacular, I would make it a "twofold payback." There were only two things I could do. First, the content of the advertising. Customarily it would be a love story between Chihiro and Haku. But I thought it was different. It was the story of Chihiro and No-Face. More often than not, directors don't always know what they are creating. As I started to advertise featuring No-Face, Hayao Miyazaki came to me with a dubious expression.

"Suzuki, are you going to advertise the film with No-Face?"

I answered him in an offhand manner.

"Yes, because it's the story of Chihiro and No-Face."

In addition, I would double the number of theaters and the advertising budget compared to *Princess Mononoke*. I contacted the person in charge of theatrical distribution.

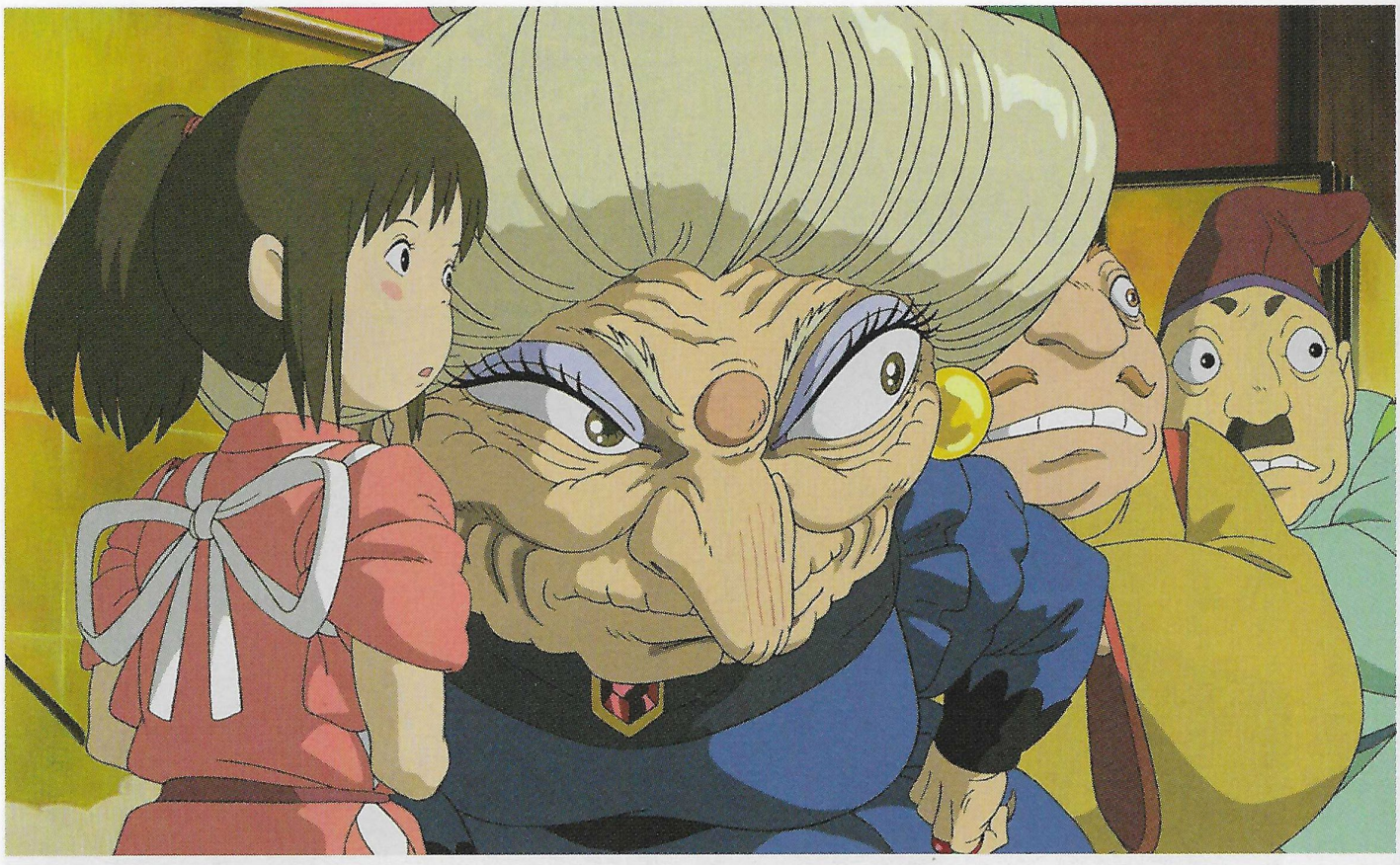
This was how in the summer of 2001, *Spirited Away* broke the record of *Princess Mononoke* in a big way, to set a new unbeatable record. This was far beyond what I had anticipated, and an unbelievable number at that.

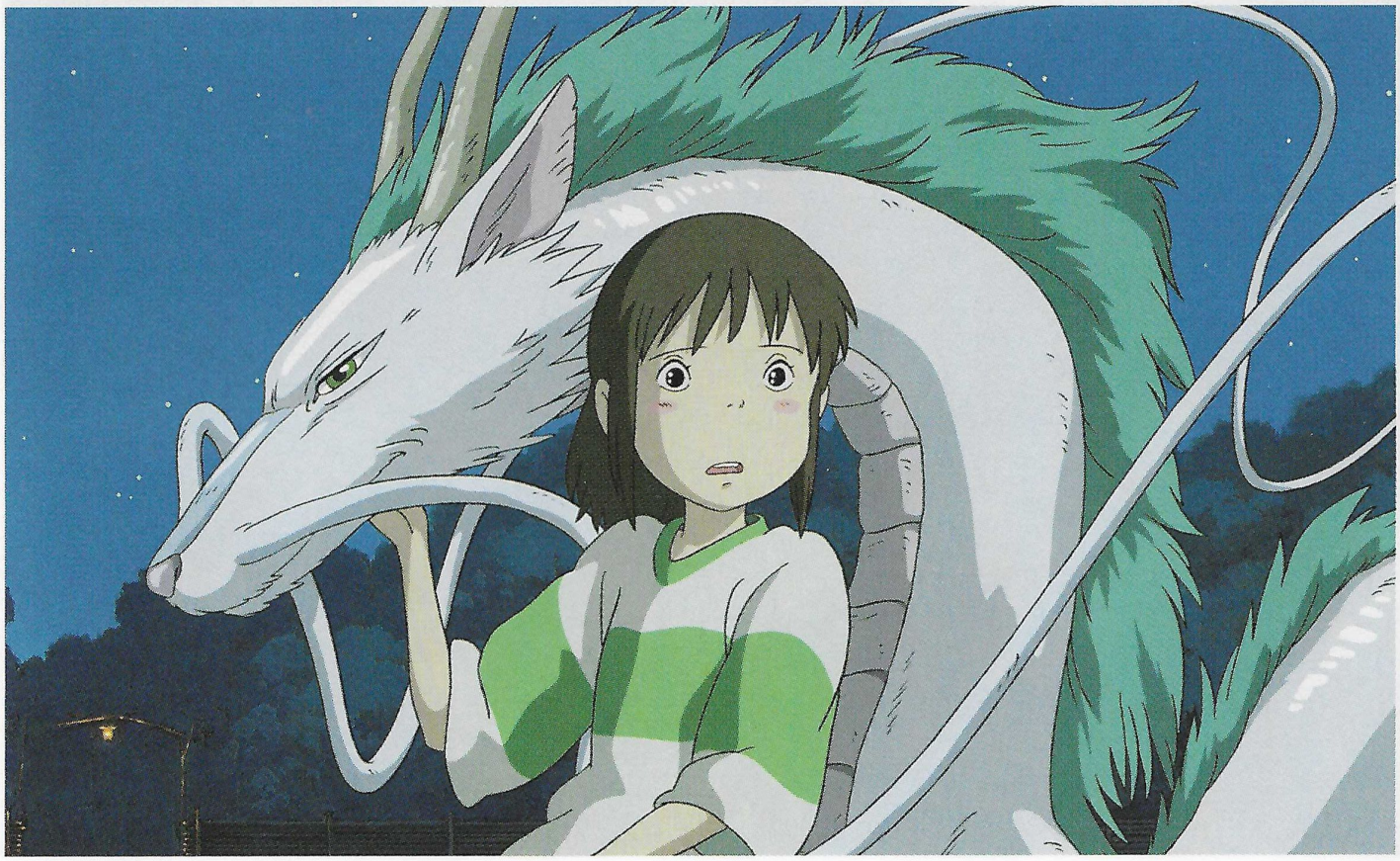
Why did *Spirited Away* rack up such an unbeatable box office record? The film was great. The advertising went well. The distribution and business end made great efforts. All went well, but what I can't forget is that one comment made by Fujimaki.

February 2014

Studio Ghibli Producer Toshio Suzuki

(Written for the release on Blu-ray disc of *Spirited Away* in Japan)





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

CHIHIRO'S MYSTERIOUS TOWN
THE AIM OF THIS FILM

I would say that this film is an adventure story even though there is no brandishing of weapons or battles involving supernatural powers. However, this story is not a showdown between right and wrong. It is a story in which the heroine will be thrown into a place where the good and the bad dwell together, and there, she will experience the world. She will learn about friendship and devotion, and will survive by making full use of her brain. She sees herself through the crisis, avoids danger and gets herself back to the ordinary world somehow. She manages, not because she has destroyed the "evil," but because she has acquired the ability to survive.

The main theme of this film is to describe, in the form of a fantasy, some of the things in this world which have become vague, and the indistinct world which tends towards erosion and ruin.

In everyday life, where we are surrounded, protected, and kept out of danger's way, it is difficult to feel that we are working to survive in this world. Children can only enlarge their fragile egos. Chihiro's skinny legs and her sulky face are their symbols. However, once the reality becomes clear and once she encounters a crisis, she will surely be aware of the life she actually possesses and of a capacity for flexibility and patience, and for decisive judgement and action.

Most people just panic and collapse while shouting, "It can't be true." Those people will be erased or eaten up in the situation in which Chihiro finds herself. In fact, Chihiro's being strong enough not to be eaten up is just what makes her a heroine. She is a heroine not because she is beautiful or because she possesses a unique mind. This is the key characteristic of this work, and therefore it is a good story for ten-year-old girls.

Words are power. In the world Chihiro wandered into, words have a great importance and immutability. At "Yuya," where Yubaba rules, if Chihiro were to say, "I don't want to do this," or "I want to go home," she would be eliminated by the sorceress. She would be made to wander about with

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